

Homily 6th Sunday of Easter Year A 2023

The community within which Jesus grew up, like all communities in Israel at that time, placed high value on honour: personal, family and community honour. This still exists in most Asian cultures today. Individual dishonour brings dishonour on oneself, one's family and on the community of which one is part. John Pilch sj writes that: *secrecy, lying, and deception are key strategies in the culture (of the people among whom Jesus lived) for protecting one's honour. It is always difficult to know the truth; the suspicion is always that others are lying.*

Though this makes life very difficult, the culture offers strategies for affirming that truth is being told. One is to call God to witness to what one says. The prohibition against using God's name in vain is a prohibition against calling God to witness a lie. The fact that such a commandment exists suggests that it was a common practice to name God as witness to a lie.

Within all denominations of the Christian Faith there are different understandings of the Truth that Jesus taught. Within the Catholic faith, too, there are different understandings of the teachings of the Church. It is only when these different understandings cause division that they become harmful. If our understanding of the faith helps us live the faith with trust and loyalty in Jesus Christ, helps us treat others with dignity and honour and help those in need as far as we can, then it is not a question of being right or wrong, it is about being faithful to God, to Jesus Christ.

I am reminded of the story of the Jewish Rabbi who was confronted by a married couple at odds with each other. They came to him while he was helping a trainee rabbi. The rabbi first sees the wife who vociferously recounts all the faults of her husband and that he is to blame for the present upset. The Rabbi ponders over this for a while and says: *You are right!* Next the Rabbi meets with the husband who was equally eloquent about all the faults of his wife, contradicting everything that the wife had said, and tells the Rabbi that she is the cause of the present upset. Once again after reflection, the Rabbi says; *You are right!*

After the couple left, the young trainee says to the Rabbi: *You said to each of them that they were right and yet they contradicted each other, they can't both be right!* The Rabbi ponders this for a while and says: *You are right too!!* Something to ponder!!!

Taken out of context our short Gospel today could be very off-putting. Jesus invites people to follow him and be hated by others, face suffering, torment and rejection, in fact, have a most unhappy and miserable future. Not very enticing, is it?

However, Jesus promises his disciples that although he may be absent for a few days he will never really leave them. To help, Jesus says that he will send them the Holy Spirit who will work great wonders in their lives. We do well to reflect on our baptism in which we become temples of the Holy Spirit, the advocate, but a temple in which both the Son, Jesus, dwells and wherever Jesus is there too is the Father. We are Temples of God and, however small we might think our temple to be, God's presence makes it spacious, welcoming and supportive. It is a place of reassurance and affirmation; it promotes dignity and honour. This too is something to ponder.

A Sunday school teacher asked her year 2 children.....

Do any of you know another name for God. She was looking for answers like 'Lord' or 'Almighty'.

After a long moment of silence a little boy raised his hand and said, "Howard." "Howard?" replied the confused teacher. "You know," continued the boy, "Howard be thy name."